

House approves legislation by a vote of 220-215

Washington, DC – In anticipation of final passage of the *Affordable Health Care for America Act* (H.R. 3962), Congresswoman Betty McCollum (MN-4) today entered the following Floor Statement into the Congressional Record:

Madam Speaker, today we are making history. Today the U.S. House of Representatives is making health care in the United States of America more affordable and more accessible for millions of our citizens. This legislation may not be perfect, but it is very good. It will make our country stronger, our economy more productive, and every American family healthier.

Our goal is to achieve universal coverage so that every Minnesotan and every American has the ability to access quality, affordable health care. The Affordable Health Care for America Act (H.R. 3962) comes closer than ever before to realizing that goal by extending health insurance coverage to ninety-six percent of Americans.

This bill will have immediate and lasting benefits for millions of Americans. It will give families the confidence and security that comes with knowing they will be able to access quality, affordable health care when they or a family member is sick. And it places affordable health care coverage within reach for millions of American families who are asking for our help.

As I have often said, I believe that health care should be a right for all Americans. Critics of making health care a right often say we already have universal health care since people can go

to the emergency room and access care if they really need it. This flawed logic is the best example of why I believe health care in America is broken and must be fixed.

Our health care system is broken when we live in the wealthiest, most powerful country in the world, but health care is a privilege available to only those with enough money to afford insurance and for those of us fortunate enough to have a job that provides health insurance.

Our health care system is broken when sixty million people in this country have no health insurance coverage or are under-insured – more than 85 percent of whom are from working families.

Our health care system is broken when families are forced to postpone or skip necessary care because premiums have increased more than 90 percent in the last nine years for Minnesota families.

Our health care system is broken when our country spends \$2.4 trillion a year for health care – almost twice as much per person as any other country – but we rank 37th in the world in health care outcomes.

Our health care system is broken when you can be denied coverage for being sick, for having a baby, or for suffering from domestic violence.

Our health care system is broken when 45,000 people die in the United States each year because they lack health insurance and can not access needed care.

We can and must do better. Today we have an opportunity to save these lives and make affordable health care insurance a reality for every American.

My constituents and all citizens across this country need to know what is in this bill to help American families and workers. This legislation will make quality health care more affordable

and more accessible for every patient. □ It will protect families from falling into bankruptcy due to unaffordable costs by limiting out-of-pocket costs, lifting lifetime limits on coverage, and lowering premiums.

First and foremost, if you love your doctor and like your current insurance, you are free to keep what you have. This legislation does not require you to make any changes. Yet, the ranks of the insured are shrinking more every year and the numbers of satisfied citizens are falling. Millions of Americans have too little insurance, too few choices, and no options left. □ For those Americans – for most Americans – this legislation is a lifeline to the security they have longed for and long-deserved.

This bill will give every American the peace of mind that insurance companies can no longer deny coverage for pre-existing conditions, or cancel your coverage when you are sick and need it the most.

It includes a competitive public insurance option to guarantee that Americans will have an affordable choice among insurance providers and keep private insurers honest.

It improves health care for patients and their families by making investments to increase the number of providers, improve access to primary care, and support a patient-centered approach that focuses on quality and emphasizes prevention.

For our seniors, this legislation will strengthen Medicare by eliminating the waste, fraud and abuse that diverts health care dollars away from care and into the pockets of crooked companies. □ It will immediately begin closing the “donut hole” in the Medicare prescription drug benefit to make prescriptions more affordable. □ And it will ensure the financial stability and solvency of Medicare for 45 million seniors.

For our children, it will help expand coverage and ensure that the youngest Americans receive quality coverage that includes essential benefits such as vision and oral services. And it will extend coverage for young people by allowing them to remain on their parent’s insurance until their 27th birthday.

The Affordable Health Care for America Act does all these things while meeting President Obama's call for new costs to be covered. In fact, the bill goes much farther by reducing the deficit by \$109 billion over the next ten years.

This comprehensive health care legislation is ambitious by necessity. I have confidence every one of these reforms will be implemented successfully because of what my state of Minnesota has accomplished. Through a combination of smart investments and an enduring commitment to care for all of our friends and neighbors, my state proved a high-quality, low-cost health care system is possible.

Minnesota

is consistently ranked among the highest in the nation for quality of care and rates of insured citizens – almost ninety-two percent. And

Minnesota

attains these high standards with some of the lowest costs in the country.

Unfortunately, our state is forced to work with fewer resources than most other states because of the Medicare geographic payment disparity. Medicare's outdated and unfair reimbursement system pays Minnesota doctors and hospitals at some of the country's lowest rates, despite the fact they produce some of the country's best patient outcomes. The current system rewards the amount of services provided rather than the quality of care patients receive.

Patients, providers, health plans, hospitals, and unions have all told me that ending this disparity and reversing this flawed incentive structure is the most important issue for Minnesota in the national debate on health care reform. While Minnesota's health care system is excellent today, the broken Medicare payment system threatens to undermine it in years to come.

This health care reform legislation is our last best chance to fix this problem, achieve fairness for Minnesotans, and make evidence-based, quality care the standard wherever you live in the United States

. That is why I worked to unite forty of my House colleagues who represent seventeen different states in a new Quality Care Coalition. Together with my coalition co-chairs Representatives Bruce Braley, Ron Kind and Jay Inslee, we created the political will we have always needed but never had to address this problem. After more than twenty coalition meetings over the course of six months and a series of intensive negotiations with House Leadership, our coalition secured an agreement to end the unfair treatment of high quality, low-cost states such as Minnesota

. And by securing fairness for our states, we will be helping to deliver better quality for all patients in every state.

This agreement places America on a path to reward high quality, evidence based, cost-effective health care by making fundamental improvements in the delivery system. H.R. 3962 directs the highly-regarded Institute of Medicine to develop recommendations on how to modernize the Medicare payment system so it rewards value and quality. This will transform the Medicare payment system to ensure better care for patients and reduce health care costs over the long-term, and will help secure a better future for our patients, families, and seniors.

While the legislation we vote on today would make unprecedented reforms, I will continue working to improve the bill before it returns to the House for a final vote. To be truly comprehensive, health care reform legislation must reach all Americans, including the 15 million citizens employed in the nonprofit sector. Achieving parity between small nonprofit and for-profit employers in this legislation is one item of unfinished business. I am also concerned with the burden this bill places on the medical device industry to generate revenue and potentially negative impact such a tax would have on patients, workers, and small businesses. I look forward to working with House Leadership and the conference committee to help address these issues and strengthen this legislation.

Still, H.R. 3962 remains a historic achievement. This legislation addresses the needs of Minnesota's families and families across this country. It modernizes Medicare and covers the uninsured. It invests in prevention instead of paying for disease. For these reasons and many more, the Affordable Health Care for America Act has the support of over three-hundred state and national organizations. These supporters include the American Nurses Association, American Medical Association, SEIU, AFL-CIO, and AARP. Organizations representing millions of Americans back this legislation because they know our health care system is broken and change cannot wait another year.

Still, there are critics of health care reform that are fighting desperately to maintain the status quo. It is disappointing to see Republicans choose health care profiteers and insurance companies over reforms that Americans need and want. My Republican colleagues have offered politics and posturing but no real solutions. They have no serious alternative to H.R. 3962 to control costs, expand access and improve quality. They have made killing health reform and killing America's chance at achieving health reform their only goal. The American people deserve better.

I would like to thank Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader Hoyer, Majority Whip Clyburn and Caucus Chair Larson for their extraordinary leadership to bring affordable, quality health care to all Americans. □ Thanks are owed to the three committee chairman – Chairman Waxman, Chairman Rangel, and Chairman Miller – who held dozens of hearings throughout the year and crafted a historic bill. □ I would also like to thank Chairman Dingell for his dedicated service in introducing health care legislation for over fifty years to bring health care coverage for all Americans.

I would especially like to thank Speaker Pelosi for her attention to the concerns of the Quality Care Coalition and all of the diverse interests of the Caucus. □ Vice Chairman Becerra also has my gratitude for the vital role he played in negotiating this agreement to move health care reform toward high quality, cost-effective care.

Today is a historic step toward making health care reform a reality, but it is not the end. I urge the Senate to stay focused and committed so an equally strong bill meets H.R. 3962 in conference committee. □ I am committed to sending a health care bill to the President's desk that will bring meaningful reform for American families, seniors and businesses. □ With passage of this legislation health care will no longer be a privilege for those who can afford it.

I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 3962 and guarantee that affordable, quality health care will be accessible for every Minnesota family.

Congresswoman Betty McCollum (MN-4) serves on the House Appropriations & Budget Committees.

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